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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes Leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of Leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to editor.platypusreview@gmail.com. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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About the Platypus Affiliated Society
The Platypus Affiliated Society, established in December 2006, organizes reading groups, public fora, research and journalism focused on problems and tasks inherited from the "Old" (1920s–30s), "New" (1960s–70s) and post-political (1980s–90s) Left for the possibilities of emancipatory politics today.

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Constant radical

An interview with Sue Bradford

Michael McClelland

On June 6, 2023, Platypus Affiliated Society member Michael McClelland interviewed Sue Bradford. Bradford joined the Left in Aotearoa, New Zealand during the New Left era, participating in various organizations that recruited on campuses during the anti-Vietnam protests of the 1960s and 70s. After a brief absence from activism, she took part in 1981's anti-racist campaigns against apartheid South Africa's rugby team, who were then touring New Zealand. Shortly after, she joined the unemployed workers' movement in the 1980s, before eventually becoming a household name as a Green Party Member of Parliament for 10 years in the 2000s. She now runs workshops for activists from a cooperative which she co-founded, Kōtare in Wellsford, where she also lives. An edited transcript follows.

Michael McClelland: How aware were you of the Left as a child?

Sue Bradford: I grew up in a household that was on the bohemian Left, so we were quite politically aware. We had parties with a lot of artists and writers and those kinds of people. When I was in primary and intermediate school, the Labour Party was a monolith in New Zealand. I didn't have much awareness of other groups. My father was active in the Labour Party, but in a wider way. I used to go out on election days with him, taking old folks to the polling booths. He had briefly been a communist when he was young and in the military during World War II. I never knew the full story, except that he had hated what he saw in the war in Italy. He never talked about it. He actually became very hostile to communism. My mother, who was American, was supportive of the struggle of African Americans, and was Left of Labour.

MM: What did the Left look like in central Auckland in the early 1960s?

SB: My first encounter with the Left was actually in America in 1965–66, when my family went there for my father's work. I was in 10th grade at high school in Madison, Wisconsin, where there were political groups organizing against the Vietnam War. Those were my first political meetings. African American struggles were huge as well.

MM: Can you remember the first time you encountered Marxism?

SB: After I came back from America, I went to Auckland Girls' Grammar School. It felt like a prison in comparison to high school in America. There, it was a mature place, where I was treated like an adult at university. But coming back to New Zealand, going to school felt like being a child again, and I hated it. I soon found myself interested in history and current affairs. I was thinking a lot about Vietnam, colonization, and imperialism. I started to get interested in what was happening locally in the peace movement. At that time, there wasn't too much activity. By the time I was 15, in the fifth form at high school, my friend Rosie and I became really interested in Marxism.

MM: You sold communist literature at high school, right?

SB: Yeah, Mao's *Little Red Book* (1964).[1] The school was unhappy, but I sold a lot of copies. Rosie and I didn't have much access to material, in general, so we asked to join the Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ).[2] We just knocked on their door. From that point onwards, we were within that loop because they knew about us.

MM: Would the PYM have understood itself as a Maoist group?

SB: Not openly. The comrades that were active in the PYM would have thought of it as Maoist, and so would those who studied with them, like Rosie and I. I don't know if everybody would have seen it that way, because not everyone was so deeply into studying. We were also into activity and action. The PYM was very militant, particularly on fighting the Vietnam War, and in the sense of being in solidarity with our brothers and sisters all over the world.

MM: Jenny Chamberlain's biography of you, *Constant Radical* (2017), mentions that you later came to reject the totalitarianism of communist China. Did Maoism remain with you over the years despite this?

SB: Maoism has certainly stayed with me. The most intense study I ever did on Marxist theory was in my fifth and sixth form years. I've never been so deep into theory or history as I was during that time, but that doesn't mean all that knowledge hasn't stuck. I didn't stay that long in the PYM, only a couple of years; probably more knowledge has stuck from the CPNZ study groups, because they were impressive. When I joined the Workers' Communist League (WCL)[4] in the 1980s, there were quite a few other members who had also been consciously Maoist when they were younger. The WCL felt like a direct descendent of the PYM. We were the ones who had been looking for a party, but hadn't found one. It taught me that one of the most valuable things that a communist or socialist party-type organization can offer is a place where members can have strategic discussions: what role is the most valuable use of which member? What skills and experiences does *x* person have? What is their background? Should they work in the factory, or should they be a teacher, etc.? You dedicate your whole life to it.

One of the biggest losses of not having such a party now is that we don't have those places to hear those conversations. There are young people who are at uni, or leaving uni, or are in a job, or in a union, but they don't know where to go. Young people don't have a co-ordinated, strategic, and analytical place to have open conversations, both in terms of where individuals are placed and also where the group is placed: "do we go and work in this or that union? Do we work in this or that group or political movement?'

MM: Do you think Maoism in general has had a lasting influence on today's Left?

SB: It's become an ambient idea, and, for some of us, has never gone away. Some people have come to New Zealand as migrants from countries where they had moved on from different organizing bases, particularly in Asia. Although, I'm not thinking of absolute classic Maoism. There's no way that we weren't trained as Maoist, originally, and there's no question that Maoism remains an influence.

MM: After Mao's death in 1976, some Left groups on the local and international scene began drifting towards Trotskyism. In New Zealand, for instance, the CPNZ merged with the International Socialist Organisation. Why didn't you follow this path?

SB: Ever since my first contact with Left political groups, I was suspicious of Trotskyism. Not so much on the theoretical level, because much later on, I saw that writers like Gramsci had so much to offer. But in practice, Trotskyists just split and split and split, and they seemed to go down to the smallest possible fraction.

MM: What did you learn about mass political organizations during your first political engagements in the late 1960s and early 70s?

SB: I started studying at the University of Auckland in 1969 at the age of 16, where I began thinking more critically. It was only when I deeply studied history and politics that I began to question some of what I had been learning as straight Maoism. Also, I became part of a group that set up the Resistance Bookshop on Queen Street.[5] I was in the first group of 12 people, and the only woman, or rather, girl, at the time. It was a highly political action and organizing base where we were selling books, printing, writing, and thinking. I was also in an active circle that was associating across the Left in Auckland at that time. Tim Shadbolt[6] and the anarchists were our friends, as well as members of the PYM. We were kind of associated with the PYM. We were kind of associated with some of the people who did some of the more militant actions, like bombings, which aren't very much known in this country. Even now, I don't know how much to tell you, because there are some things from that time I've never told anyone. There are certain protections that have remained in place over time.

MM: How did your politics develop in the 1970s?

SB: I started studying at the University of Auckland in the late 1960s and early 70s?

MM: Why do you mention that you didn't join the CPNZ? Was it taken for granted that people would join the Party back then?

SB: No, the Party was incredibly conservative, and we were the hippie generation. In the Party, there was no sex outside of marriage, theoretically. Anything like smoking dope, or much less anything else, was against all regulations. So, the Party was conservative on sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll — although alcoholism was fine. As those early years went by, I became increasingly annoyed by how women and girls were treated by the male leaders of organizations. All those Women's Liberation issues were very real at that time. As far as the men were concerned, we were there to cook, to type, to be on the actions, or to be there to have sex. We weren't

Advancing by return?

An interview with Spencer A. Leonard

Pamela C. Nogales C. and Andreas Wintersperger

On March 12, 2023, for episode 56 of the podcast Sh*t Platypus Says,[1] *Platypus Affiliated Society members Pamela C. Nogales C. and Andreas Wintersperger interviewed Spencer A. Leonard about the two volumes of Marx and Engels's journalism that he has edited and written introductions for:* Marx and Engels on Imperialism: Selected Journalism, 1856–62 *and* Marx and Engels on Bonapartism: Selected Journalism, 1851–59*. Both volumes were published in 2023 by Lexington Books. Leonard is a founding member of the Platypus Affiliated Society. He teaches sociology at James Madison University. An edited transcript follows.*

Andreas Wintersperger: Was there a specific event or tendency in recent history that motivated you to publish and curate Marx and Engels's journalistic works now?

Spencer A. Leonard: Not really. This is a product of long years of reflection. I was deeply engaged with Marx before the foundation of Platypus. Already, as a student of Moishe Postone and a failed recruit to an American sectarian Leftist organization (the ISO[2]), I felt the opposition between political Marxism and Marxism as a kind of sociology or social theory. I was Postone's research assistant even as I was studying with Indian ex-Maoists, Subaltern School historians, for whom Marx's journalism on India was a major touchstone. They had a more political conception of Marxism filtered through Marxism-Leninism or Maoism, whether as Naxalites or as members of the mainstream parliamentary party.[3] The way I received Marx was confused, and I wanted clarity.

The lack of clarity that I experienced had roots stretching back into the history of Marxism, ultimately back into the Second International, where Marx's critique of political economy was taken as a kind of license to liquidate orthodox Marxism politically. Eduard Bernstein would have understood himself as "revising," bringing up to date, the Marx of *Das Kapital* (1867), in order to abandon a political Marxism rooted in the writings on the revolutions of 1848 and the Paris Commune, which would have been the *loci classici* of revolutionary Marxism (which, of course, never disclaimed *Das Kapital*).

That is all deep background. To answer your question more plainly, this project was conceived of in the aftermath of Occupy. At that time, we hadn't quite reached the liquidation of the Millennial Left into capitalist politics, but the party question loomed, as in the debates around SYRIZA and Podemos. Occupy represented a kind of discontent with the Democrats and the Labour Party, etc. — with inherited social democracy and what passes for that in the United States. In Platypus, we were developing a deeper sense of the significance of the Second International and the "class line," in the sense of what it meant historically to independently organize a working-class party for socialism, a working-class politics that is critical of, distanced from, and deliberate in its relationship to capitalist politics. The question of capitalist politics raised the history and the meaning of Bonapartism.

One of my favorite phrases from Marx's English-language journalism that I've published is "imperial socialism," i.e., socialism as capitalist state policy. French socialists attempted to realize their aspirations through Louis Bonaparte's regime. That is what capitalist politics does. "Leftists" think they are advancing their purposes, when, in fact, they are supplying the content of capitalist politics.

The roots of this project are there. I really dug into the work after 2017 and the complete liquidation of the American Left, as I had known it my entire life, into the Democratic Party — the liquidation of the sectarian Left. The meaning of the Millennial Left, which had emerged in the antiwar movement, proved to be the reconstitution of the Democratic Party, and they took the old sectarian Left down with them.

Pamela C. Nogales C.: In your introduction to *Marx and Engels on Bonapartism*, you trace Marx and Engels's political transformation in and through the 1848 Revolutions. You characterize this change as leaving behind their "neo-Jacobin" politics — bound up in the legacy of François-Noël Babeuf and the Constitution of 1793 — in favor of what you describe as a "working-class politics." You write:

> Class independence was necessary to adequately prosecute the democratic revolution alongside other social classes, to work to achieve the dictatorship of the proletariat, the political rule of the working class and of those whom they led—a revolutionary political transition necessary to overcome and realize the potential of proletarianized, which is to say self-contradictory, society.[4]

Could you say more about the discontinuities and continuities in Marx and Engels's political evolution?

SL: There is a widespread mischaracterization of Marx and Engels's early development as essentially philosophical. That misses the fact that they were engaged with socialism and politics from the beginning. It also mischaracterizes what philosophy was or had become. Young Hegelianism was engaged with socialism; it was not only an attempt to advance the thought of Hegel despite the anxiety of influence. There were new circumstances that registered even in backward Germany in the form of Young Hegelian engagements with socialism, as, for instance, with Moses Hess and Bruno Bauer. That engagement with socialism really is a constitutive element of Marx and Engels's development from 1839 onward, that is, from when they were 19 or 20 years old. They knew about that year's Chartist uprising in Wales as well as the Blanquist uprising in Paris, which the Communist League, which included German workers, participated in. There is a neo-Jacobinism at the core of that, which you can see in, for instance, Marx's notes on Philippe Buonarroti, the political legatee of Babeuf, as well as in so-called "physical force" Chartism with figures like James Bronterre O'Brien. These were the beating heart of neo-Jacobinism in the 1840s. I believe that Marx first addresses the Chartists in 1845 on the anniversary of the adoption of the Jacobin Constitution. There is a self-conscious neo-Jacobinism in Britain.

Which brings me to the statement that Marx makes in his 1852 letter to Joseph Weydemeyer, his close comrade in the Communist League and one of the few members who could be viewed as a kind of intellectual extension of Marx and Engels, alongside Wilhelm Wolff and Marx's wife, Jenny. When Marx writes to Weydemeyer saying, "I did not develop the concept of class struggle. French liberal historians did that. My only contribution is the recognition of the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat,"[5] he is educating Weydemeyer, because the Communist League had not been entirely clear about that. They knew that the French Revolution was not over and that the revolution of 1830 in France was aborted and that revolution was returning in the 1840s. Their entire young adulthood had been lived in a period of revolutionary ferment. They went into 1848 with the idea that they would be the working-class wing of the democratic revolution, in the way they thought the Jacobins represented a culmination of a process that began in 1789, reached steadily into deeper and deeper layers of Parisian society, and drove forward a dynamic of radicalization, from the Tennis Court Oath to the reign of the Committee of Public Safety under the Jacobins. This process was viewed as one of democratization. Marx and Engels thought that the working class was going to propel forward the new democratic revolution. To do this it did not require a separate organization and party form. As they wrote in the *Manifesto* (1848), communism simply represented "the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class. . . that section which pushes forward all others."[6]

There is a historical debate as to whether the Communist League was dissolved at the outbreak of the revolution in favor of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, which was really the only organized expression of Marx and Engels's politics in 1848. But the question is somewhat idle, as, quite obviously, the League was not a party in the Marxist sense. It did not function as a party in the Revolution of 1848.

In the period from 1850 to 1852 — from the end of the Revolution, Marx and Engels's entrance into exile, and the "Address to the Communist League" (1850) to the drafting of the *Eighteenth Brumaire* (1851–52) and the letter to Weydemeyer — Marx and Engels distilled the lessons of 1848: the recurrence of the bourgeois revolution in the context of capital might be a repetition and regression at the same time. As Marx put it in the opening paragraphs of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, revolution in the age of capital might conquer no new ground.[7] That was in their experience quite literally, geographically true: the bourgeois revolution failed to expand into Germany. It is hard for people to imagine today, but the expectation was that the bourgeois revolution would expand: what had begun in Holland, England, America, and France was the inheritance of the whole world and would spread to the whole world. But the revolution would also deepen so as to address the needs of the core of the Third Estate, the working class. It would address working concerns, and working people would become politically central to it. It was thought that the revolution would conquer both new geographical and historical ground. The dynamic would be to address more thoroughly the needs of labor, a process that had just begun with, for instance, the *sans-culottes*' support for the Jacobins. But Marx and Engels's experience in 1848–49 belied this expectation.

The bourgeoisie proved inadequate to the task of revolution, showing itself to be beholden to the aristocracy. Any Marxist can recite this point on the basis of Marx's writings on Germany. But what it expressed was the crisis of the entire modern revolution and its self-consciousness as expressed through the Enlightenment or liberal-ism (which was thereby becoming an "ism"). The inheritance of the 18th century was inadequate to the task of the 19th, and the crisis took the form of Bonapartist democracy.

By this process Marx and Engels became (more fully) aware that they faced new circumstances, that they were tasked, as Louis Menand put it, with being "*philosophes* of a second Enlightenment."[8] They were forced to re-pose the questions: what is the task of our time? Why can we not just advance the bourgeois revolution?

Marx and Engels alone learned the lessons of 1848. As such, they fully represented the self-consciousness of the age of proletarian socialism. Their problem was akin to the crisis of Hegelian philosophy, but, after 1848, that original problem deepened, transformed, and became more intensely political. The historical process had reached its crucial culmination and crisis in the experience of 1848. That was the defining experience for Marx and Engels. In *State and Revolution* (1917), Lenin distilled the essence of Marxism, tracing it from the *Manifesto*, through the experience of the Revolution of 1848, to the recognition of the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat — and on through the experience of the repetition of the Revolution of 1848 in the Paris Commune (1871), where the Left itself showed that, in some crucial sense, it had learned the lesson of 1848. There the working class demonstrated its recognition of the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat precisely by working through and discarding the empty shells of earlier socialisms, specifically Blanquism and Proudhonism.

To summarize, what orthodox Marxism recognized as Marx's great insight arose from the experience of 1848. The elaboration of that insight is what I trace through the journalism of the 1850s. In this sense, I deliberately disavow forming an independent judgment, feeling that this would inevitably be to fall below the level set by the past. Instead, I have tried to pursue, elaborate, or test the perspective of Marxist orthodoxy. I elaborate what Marxists understood by Marxism with reference to materials that they had no access to. Marx and Engels reflected upon the actual historical experience of their time, grasping it as an age of Bonapartism and capital (pointing towards the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism). The question my books are intended to provoke is, are we still living in the age of proletarian socialism? Are Marx and Engels still our contemporaries?

PN: The democratic revolution reached its height in the American and French Revolutions, but, as you write in the introduction, the task of the "democratic revolution" became "self-contradictory" under the conditions of a capitalist society.[9] You seem to depart here from the formulation by Left historians like Domenico Losurdo, who argued in an interview with the *Platypus Review* that the freedom gained in 1776 and 1789 was hardly universal, meaning that it was not emancipatory in the radical sense.[10] Losurdo quibbled with Marx, who "spoke of the bourgeois revolutions as providing political emancipation," noting that, "perhaps Marx didn't see the aspect of de-emancipation."[11] You argue that Marx and Engels did not reject the earlier democratic revolution or its gains, but rather that "the society [it created] was transformed by its very realization, as its freedom grew self-contradictory." Could you elaborate on this issue of the self-contradiction of society and how it differs from Losurdo's "emancipation / de-emancipation" argument?

SL: When we think about something like "liberal democracy," in the era up to the French Revolution there is a relationship between democratizing and liberalizing, but the revolutionary project is liberal. Democracy is a means to that. For instance, in the American Revolution — or the crisis of the British Revolution, which is really what the American Revolution is — the inadequacy of society's representation in Parliament was an issue. Growing out of the Wilkesite movement[12] of the 1760s, demands for universal suffrage were raised in Britain in 1775–76, as, most famously, in John Cartwright's *Take Your Choice!* But, whether in Britain or America, the American Revolution was not just about representation in colonial legislatures but about the liberal self-transformation of society per se. That took on heightened salience in the French Revolution, where the suffrage was expanded in concert with the deepening of the revolution, perhaps even provoking a certain confusion of democracy with revolution. I've already mentioned the Jacobin or Montagnard Constitution of 1792. Even there, the aspiration was not democratization for its own sake, but the self-emancipation of society. The revolutionaries sought to give scope to social freedom, society's capacity to transform itself in history. The self-emancipation of society means giving free play to society's capacity for the exercise of public reason, and thus self-legislation and self-transformation. That goal is not democratic, but liberal. An expanded or universal suffrage may or may not advance it.

Domenico Losurdo is hostile to liberalism. He is a vulgar Marxist who views the bourgeois revolution as undertaken by or on behalf of the bourgeoisie. But, really, the bourgeoisie as such — propertied merchants or owners of firms — were never particularly revolutionary. Indeed, unsurprisingly, property owners of all sorts (and not just feudal lords) tend to be conservative in the face of radical social change. At no time did the bourgeoisie especially propel forward any of what we call the bourgeois revolutions. That goes for the English Revolution in the 17th century, in which revolutionary aristocrats were certainly found among the Roundheads and Whigs, as was the case in the French Revolution. There were figures like John Hampden, John Locke's patron Lord Shaftesbury, Thomas Jefferson, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Count Mirabeau, to name a few. They were not revolutionary as aristocrats anymore than revolutionary bourgeois were revolutionary as bourgeois. They were gripped by the fervor of the revolution, as in the great moment in the French Revolution, August 4, 1789, when the aristocracy deliberately renounces its feudal privileges. The project of the Third Estate's self-emancipation was universal.

By "bourgeois revolution," Marxists refer to the emancipation of the new form of urban sociality, and here there is a strong contrast with socialism. Socialism is not developing in the womb of capitalism. At best, the *capacity for socialist revolution* might develop within the womb of capital. But for centuries before the actual age of bourgeois revolution, bourgeois society was emerging within feudalism. As it grew, it increasingly came up against the inadequacy to itself of the law and of the state order generally. This is what propelled forward the bourgeois revolution, a process and project of adequating the state to society. The state was subordinated to the needs of society, something clearly expressed by, for instance, parliamentary supremacy in Britain. The King is sovereign *in Parliament assembled* and thereby is the King transformed into the monarch, the bearer of the crown, i.e., a symbol and embodiment of society's freedom, of its subordination to the law that it gives itself.

Losurdo thinks that this is all just a project of creating a new ruling class, trading in one form of exploitation for another, one ruling class for another, feudal for bourgeois lords. We might reply (with Marx) that there never was exploitation before bourgeois society. Are the peasants exploited by the feudal lords? One might just as well say that an antelope is exploited by a cheetah.

You hear this all the time: the bourgeois revolution declared the aspiration to the emancipation of labor, but was betrayed by the bourgeoisie. The revolution expressed universal values, but those proved to be partial, a mask for the selfish interests of the bourgeoisie. But this is not how Marxism, certainly not how Marx and Engels, understood the matter. They understood that the free development of society in history — as dialectical unfolding of "unsocial sociability"[13] in history giving rise to new forms and then transforming, overcoming, and realizing those to generate still newer forms — that that bourgeois dialectic of freedom had grown contradictory. Capitalism emerged with the self-realization of bourgeois society, as the freedom expressed by the commodity form of labor was generalized to the whole of society, with, for instance, even women and children becoming wage laborers. The people demanded the Industrial Revolution, and, when they got it, were faced with a new freedom problem. A Marxist understanding of the Industrial Revolution is not that it was the result of James Watt or some other inventor applying science to production. Rather, the Industrial Revolution was demanded by the emerging working class. Women want to be freed from patriarchy. Children likewise want to be free from the rule of their families. Everyone wants to be free from unfree labor, from being serfs and slaves. The wage-labor revolution demanded that the mysteries of guild production be shattered, that they be published in the *Encyclopédie*.[14] Work had to be made available to labor, which is to say, to unskilled humanity, to the raw capacity for labor, to labor power. That is what industrial labor is — a McJob.

It is precisely at that moment that the freedom of the working class comes into contradiction with itself. When the commodity form of labor is generalized across society and thereby grows self-contradictory, Marx calls that condition "capital." A new problem presents itself: the working class mastering its new-found freedom. That is entirely different from simple class exploitation, as Losurdo's perspective has it. The Marxist perspective understands class, and the exploitation that underlies it, as a phenomenal expression of an underlying historical contradiction. Of course, at a phenomenal level it is how we experience the crisis of capitalism, as when somebody in the HR department tells us that we have to be fired so that other people can keep their jobs and capital be preserved. Leftists like Losurdo have no way of grasping how capital is a problem that ultimately transcends class.

That is really what is at issue in a category like Bonapartism. Bonapartism, as the capitalist state, will sacrifice the interests of capitalists. Many a ruler today has had to kill off "his" oligarchs. As Marx says in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, bourgeois fanatics for order can be shot down on their balconies by Bonaparte's drunken soldiers,[15] because the issue is the preservation of capitalist society, not the interests of private capitalists.

PN: You wrote, "Marx and Engels's recognition was that, so long as the proletariat could not yet rule, revolution could only reconstitute bonapartism. It would meet the necessity that socialism could not."[16] Insofar as the Bolsheviks were unable to realize the task of socialism, does this mean that "the political party for socialism [was] just a form of Bonapartism?"[17] How do we make sense of this impasse in the history of the Left, that is, the impasse of perpetually reconstituting a Bonapartist politics?

SL: Without going too far afield, let's say that it is useful to confront the impasse as an impasse. Certainly Platypus is dedicated to that. We take the Bolsheviks at their word. We allow that they are Marxists, that their politics (and, indeed, the politics of the Second International) were a good faith attempt to bring Marxism to bear on history (by advancing the crisis of Marxism). We don't wish to evade that question by assuming that, say, Lenin is an authoritarian or his project was to create state capitalism. We read and engage what they wrote, asking ourselves the question, what kind of students of Marx and Engels were the Bolsheviks? That study itself dispels many mythologies on the Left, including respecting the originality and genius (or the evil genius) of Lenin. The brilliance of Lenin was, in an important way, expressed through his unoriginality, or, rather, his ability to see the relevance of Marx and Engels's legacy for the workers' movement for socialism in the much-altered circumstances of his own day. He brought Marx and Engels to bear on the circumstance of dual power in the Provisional Government of Russia in 1917. To see in the circumstances of 1917 a repetition of 1848 was beyond almost everyone but Lenin. As it happened, his dedication to Marxism provoked a crisis in his own party.

We should ask ourselves, what if *Marxism* failed? What if the Bolsheviks (and the Second International generally) were unable to realize the task of socialism? What if it were not because they did not read or understand Marx's *Das Kapital*? Maybe they were able to develop Marx beyond Marx. And yet, the Revolution in Germany fails, Lenin dies, there is a crisis of leadership, the leaders in the wake of Lenin and Luxemburg are somehow not of the same caliber, etc. Why was that? Why could those parties not learn from experience? Why could they not go beyond Lenin and Luxemburg? We in Platypus want to open those questions up. Usually what you get is, "Marx is still relevant regardless of the 20th century. He is still a great critic of capitalism." But the Marx that actually haunts the present is the Marx of Marxism. Otherwise, he is just another great thinker of the 19th century. But there were a lot of interesting socialists then, just as there were a lot of interesting liberals too. The question is, is world history done with Marxism or is the failure of Marxism a kind of suppurating wound on the health of the present? How does the specter of Marxism haunt the present?

AW: In your introduction to *Marx and Engels on Imperialism* you quote from Leon Trotsky's "Stalinism and Bolshevism" (1937):

> Does the slogan "Back to Marxism" then mean a leap over the periods of the Second and Third Internationals... to the First International? But it too broke down in its time. Thus, in the last analysis, it is a question of returning to the collected works of Marx and Engels. One can accomplish this historic leap without leaving one's study and even without taking

> off one's slippers. But how are we going to go from our classics (Marx died in 1883, Engels in 1895) to the tasks of a new epoch. . . [Studying Marx] did not however prevent the degeneration of the Soviet state and the staging of the Moscow trials. So what is to be done?[18]

You write that "we cannot proceed, against this background of the multiply compounded defeat of socialism, as if editing Marx did not place us, whether we will or no, within a history of struggle over orthodoxy, of repeated returns to Marx, threatening always to degenerate into the bibliographical quisquilia they have long since become."[19] How did you deal with that situation, with the utter irrelevance of Marxism as a political force today, in your editing of Marx and Engels's journalistic works?

SL: These are academic books. I published them this way because the Leftist press was or at least seemed closed to me, for whatever reason. At the same time, these books were not peer reviewed. I stipulated that. I knew that that would just result in demands that I clip the books' wings. So, these books are, so to speak, illegitimate, though this may be the only way to publish Marx today. You can scarcely get someone to copy edit Marxism anymore, because they want to rewrite every line. They won't let authors be authoritative. The whole attempt to publish Marxism in today's world is deeply fraught.

So, these books are not academically respectable. What are the authorities that I quote? What is the literature I engage? A respectable academic publication deals with the field as constituted by contemporary scholars, or, in the case of more obscure fields (such as my own South Asian history), at least of the most recently published works. One might be in a field or subfield in which nobody publishes except every 20 or 30 years. This is what much of South Asian history is like, because there are just too few historians to cover such a vast field. But the authorities that I quote here are people like Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Lukács, Adorno, and Benjamin. That is, of course, intended to provoke. I will not benefit professionally from publishing these books. I am not even sure that they will find a market. In short, there is at present a struggle over publishing. We find Millennial or post-Millennial expressions of this crisis of publishing in *Cosmonaut* and *Sublation*.

To get to the substance of the question more directly: Trotsky was acknowledging that Marxism has proceeded in a curious way, as Korsch says (though I doubt that Trotsky had read Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* (1923)), through a return to Marx. Marxism advances in the face of new circumstances by returning to Marx. This is why Marxism feels like religion quoting scripture. You would not do that with anything else. Why would one go back to this "outdated scholarship on capitalism"? Why would one return to writings that are unaware of the circumstances we are currently facing?

Nevertheless, there is Marx-ism. There is this phenomenon of the return to Marx and the struggle over orthodoxy, the struggle with revisionism, which pose the question of what it means to be adequate to present tasks. Trotsky is invoking that legacy of the revisionist dispute, that history of bringing Marx to bear on the crisis within Marxism.

Accordingly, in the introduction you mention, I specifically discuss the publication history of Marx's journalism, from the Old to the New Left. To the extent that they were engaged at all in the 20th century, the writings I have edited here were basically deployed by Stalinists to show that Marx was a good anti-imperialist, as they understood that. But, eventually, people read them and said, "actually, Marx was not such a good anti-imperialist. See, here he says the British are an unconscious tool of history, etc." Edward Said boiled it down saying, "Marx was an orientalist." Still, there was a last (and now seemingly interminable) return to Marx on the part of the New Left, which at least glimpsed the problem that Trotsky identified in coming to terms with the question of Stalinism.

Trotsky and the Frankfurt School stand in for that problem and the way it was reckoned with in the 1930s and, to the extent that there was a reckoning, in the post-war period — between, say, 1956 and 1976. Beyond that there is academic Leftism. It imitates the gesture of a return to Marx or of a new Marx as an academic marketing gimmick, as a means to get grants. Now we have a new ecological Marx and Marx as an ally of Black Lives Matter — Karl Marx wants you to vote for Joe Biden!

In my introductions I have tried neither to isolate the Marx of the 19th century, as if we could strip away the history of Marxism, nor to present Marx as perennially relevant, standing ready to inform our practice today. Rather, I acknowledge that the publication of Marx is and should be political, even if there is no longer politics. It has to be haunted by Marx's irrelevance or the spectral nature of his relevance.

I embraced the question: what if these publications had been brought to bear on the dispute over orthodoxy? In the 1850s journalism, that would mean seeing them as concerned with Bonapartism, seeing in it a kind of antithesis and anticipation of the dictatorship of the proletariat: the Bonapartist state as a symptom and index of the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte was an analysis of Bonapartism as meeting a crisis of the revolution that cannot otherwise be resolved, not even by counterrevolution, because Bonapartism is not simply counterrevolutionary. A lot of what I selected shows Marx writing about the Bonaparte dynasty in the age of capitalism. What does it mean that they are a kind of royal dynasty in Europe, given that, as such, the Bonapartes are associated with modern freedom, with modern revolution? As a dynasty, the Bonapartes have their roots in 1789 and 1792. What does it mean that the rule of the Bonapartes, itself rooted in universal suffrage democracy, is (again) the legacy of the revolution? In that sense, the journalism I have selected is a vast elaboration of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*.

I have tried to establish that Marx's concern didn't change. He didn't write about Bonapartism in 1852 and then forgot about it as he wrote the *Grundrisse* (1857–58) and *Das Kapital*. But you can read biographies today that do that. For instance, one recent biography of Marx simply skips over the revolution of 1848 in order to save space! Everything other than the writing of *Das Kapital* is treated as a distraction. People want from Marx an analysis of capitalism, rather than a self-criticism of socialism. Even when Marx had no party and no political outlet, that self-consciousness of socialism took the form of a meditation on the unfolding of Bonapartism across the globe through the reactionary decade of the 1850s. The volumes conclude with the American Civil War, which bookends the coup d'état, serving as it does as the occasion for the formation of the First International. |P

[1] Available online at <https://soundcloud.com/platypus-affiliated-society/ep56>.

[2] International Socialist Organization, dissolved in 2019.

[3] Communist Party of India (Marxist).

[4] Spencer A. Leonard, "Introduction: 1848 and the Consolidation of Marx and Engels' Marxism," in *Marx and Engels on Bonapartism: Selected Journalism, 1851–59*, ed. Spencer A. Leonard (New York: Lexington Books, 2023), 9.

[5] See Karl Marx to Joseph Weydemeyer (March 5, 1852), in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, second ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 220, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/letters/52_03_05-ab.htm>.

[6] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Proletarians and Communists," in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 484, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>.

[7] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 597, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>.

[8] Louis Menand, "Foreword: The Historical Romance," in Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (New York: New York Review Books, 2003), xviii.

[9] Leonard, "Introduction," in *Bonapartism*, 9.

[10] See Pam C. Nogales C. and Ross Wolfe, "Liberalism and Marx: An interview with Domenico Losurdo," *Platypus Review* 46 (May 2012), available at <https://platypus1917.org/2012/05/01/liberalism-and-marx-domenico-losurdo/>.

[11] Leonard, "Introduction," in *Bonapartism*, 25.

[12] After John Wilkes.

[13] See Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View" (1784), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/universal-history.htm>.

[14] Published in France between 1751 and 1772, edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert.

[15] Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, 603.

[16] Leonard, "Introduction," in *Bonapartism*, 33.

[17] Chris Cutrone, in Chris Cutrone, Mike Macnair, Adolph Reed, Jr., Tom Riley, "What is political party for the Left?," *Platypus Review* 78 (July–August 2015), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2015/08/30/political-party-left-3/>.

[18] Leon Trotsky, "Stalinism and Bolshevism," *Socialist Appeal* 1, no. 7 (September 25, 1937), 4–5, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/08/stalinism.htm>.

[19] Spencer A. Leonard, "Introduction: Beyond Dispute? Editing Marx After Marxism," in *Marx and Engels on Imperialism: Selected Journalism, 1856–62*, ed. Spencer A. Leonard (New York: Lexington Books), 21–22.

"Constant radical," cont. from page 2

MM: After the publication of your PhD thesis in 2014, you helped to form a Left-wing think tank called Economic and Social Research Aotearoa (ESRA). Part of ESRA's program was the objective of "developing an intellectual armoury for the radical left, based on high quality research and the development of theory relevant to the antagonisms and contradictions of our place and time." Can you tell me about the trajectory of ESRA?

SB: ESRA was a direct result of my thesis. About half the point of the thesis was to explore the potential for setting up a radical Left think tank, and so I formed a group of people who were interested in working on a development project. That process began in early 2014, and in that group we did a lot of public meetings. It was extraordinary, when I look back on how many meetings we did around the country, and we got interest from a lot of people on the Left. By the time I finished my involvement with ESRA a few years later, there were about 800 people on our contacts list.

It was hard to get money. We were using old community development principles, ones that I've always worked with, in terms of looking to supporters for donations, even if they can only give a bit, and to build support across many people rather than large donors — though we would've liked them. We were doing our best, but after a few years, inner tensions and some acute interpersonal issues meant that ESRA imploded, and I, along with a group of people that had come from a similar activist and ideological background, left ESRA.

We could have stayed, and had this huge fight with those on the other side within the organization. But because I'm a publicly known person in New Zealand, my being involved in that kind of split would have stayed quiet for only about 24 hours; the fight would have been out on social media and then into the mainstream media, which would have been bad for the Left. Those of us who chose to leave had spent a weekend talking, thinking, and debating what to do: "This is terrible; here's this whole project we've put years of our lives into, and they're just blowing it up." But it just wasn't possible to stay; what was going on wasn't tolerable.

MM: What caused the fracture?

SB: It was partly the role of one or two individuals, which I can't talk about in detail. I can see mistakes about how we developed the organization. The core of the debate concerned whether ESRA would be a think tank that worked with and served trade unions and community-based organizations. That had always been the concept for the people on my side of ESRA. On the other hand, those who opposed us within ESRA saw it as an elite little unit that belonged within the universities — or, one university in particular. ESRA was becoming little more than a way for a lecturer and his students to get published, and at a very high level of theory and writing, at the academic and postgraduate level. Whereas for us, the focus was on working with and for people and workers, for revolutionary change on the ground. The fracture of ESRA was a dreadful thing. It wrecked my life for a few years, because I had put so much into it. Other people had bad times because of the break-up, and some more than others were damaged by it.

MM: You addressed in your thesis the risk that, because of such an organization's need for funding support, there would be the potential of its becoming embedded in New Zealand's higher education system, and not in grassroots activism.

SB: It was a prize example of many things that had been raised in my thesis by participants. It was clear that ESRA would be a hard thing to do, but that didn't stop us from trying. Quite a big group of people did try, and some poured their lives into it. The people on the other side of that debate would say the same thing. ESRA is still going, but from what I can see online, it doesn't produce much, and it's not connected to the wider network of Leftist groups in New Zealand. There may still be good people connected to it.

MM: You've had a number of years since then to reflect. What have you learned? What gives you hope for future projects?

SB: It's unlikely I will be part of another project again. It would be hard to get my hopes up. But I hope that in the long run something like what ESRA was originally aiming for might develop.

MM: What about other projects on the Left?

SB: The second part of my thesis, which I hadn't been expecting, but which came through to me strongly, addresses this craving or need that was felt by many people on the Left in this country for a party, or parties — that there was still a huge gap for either an extra-parliamentary or a parliamentary party, and that that gap weakened us immensely. That's still the case now. If there was a party-building project that I could be part of, I would be part of it tomorrow. There are many of us in that position. I met them during my thesis process, but also through my work since then. There are far more people in the anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist Left in Aotearoa than any of us realize, but we haven't found a way of bringing ourselves together. If I could be part of helping with that, I would. I'm always open to talking to anyone that's interested in that *kaupapa*,[22] either in theory or in practice.

MM: In 2020, you called for a basic income to be delivered to all New Zealanders in the wake of COVID,[23] and at that time it appeared like neoliberal governments were willing to spend their way out of the disaster. Even New Zealand's Labour Minister of Finance, Grant Robertson, at one point appeared to flirt with the idea of a basic income, although that never eventuated.[24] How do you feel about this now? Did it seem a contradiction that some sections of the Left used "grassroots" politics as a way to appeal to the state? Or did you agree with them?

SB: In the last 30 years or more, we on the Left haven't been part of serious debates about the role of the state, which is a real lack. In the unemployed movement, we used to have huge fights with the anarchists over it, which were never resolved. Since then, I've not been part of any decent discussion about the state, including the 12 years I spent in the Green Party, trying to get that party to look at its policies around the role of the state versus community, cooperatives, or other forms of organization. You'd think there would have been interest within the Greens, but no. I never once got a decent debate going inside the Green Party about its policy or other processes regarding the state.

For the last 30 or 40 years, I've been strong on the potential of both the state and the community sector — including indigenous peoples' organizations. There's a role for both the state and community sector, and the state could do more to play an enabling role for the community and indigenous sector. For example, in the late 90s, I was part of a project to set up community-owned banking, but without capital, that's just impossible. There's many overseas examples of what could be done with the state in a way that enables community and prefigurative development. In countries like America, the UK, Ireland, and even Australia, there are a lot more examples of state-enabled community economic development. I'm into building not just political power, but economic power on the Left, and access to capital and control of banking always has to be part of that.

MM: The state has been a recurring point of contention throughout the Left's history: the reign of Louis Bonaparte, the Second International and the revisionist dispute, the liquidation of Old Left mass-party politics in the era of Stalinism and the New Deal, and the influence that the U.S. Democratic Party has in fomenting Left opinion worldwide today. Did you ever witness grassroots Left demands becoming official policy by Left governments in such a way that might have worked against the Left?

SB: What Left governments in this country? We haven't had a Left government in my lifetime. The last time we had a Left government was in the 1930s.[25] I used to be very critical of Keynesianism, but as I've gotten older, I've thought that the Keynesian politics of the 1930s was an advance on what we've got now, e.g., housing.

MM: I mean so-called "left-liberal" governments. Jacinda Ardern called herself a social democrat, for instance.[26]

SB: In the 10 years I spent as a Green MP writing, speaking, and advocating on issues relating to workers and housing and welfare, I constantly put up what I saw as radical demands. These demands included building 10,000 state houses a year, or putting massive capital into the community and indigenous sector to enable them to build houses, or calling for a form of basic income. Those are quite radical demands. Basic income is a total reform of the welfare system; the welfare system would be gone. Behind that is total reform of the tax system, towards redistributive tax. You can't look at basic income without looking at tax and work. In the Green Party I tried to put radical policies forward. They've still got some good policy, but they just don't have the people who will either promote radical policies or do anything meaningful.

MM: It would be interesting to see what effect an extra-parliamentary party would have on the Greens, let alone Labour.

SB: It's a big question for some of us. It's all theoretical, but the question is whether it would be worth more to set up an extra-parliamentary party or to set up a parliamentary party, because on the one hand there's disenfranchisement for people who still see a place for an extra-parliamentary party, but on the other hand there's the disenfranchisement of having no one to vote for. Much of the Left is just binned off from the Greens, and the Māori Party is limited. If I were Māori I would be into the Māori Party, but I'm not. So, both are needed.

MM: I liked where you ended your thesis, quoting your research participant Paul Maunder. He told you, "we're in the swamp, we've got the decline of capitalism and that just produces incoherence for a hundred years . . . as something else slowly works through." You conclude your thesis by hoping that your research would help that "something else," in all its "variety, beauty and danger," to emerge. After over 100 years of defeat and counterrevolution on the Left, where do you think this "something else" is likely to come from?

SB: I see it coming from people across generations in this country, or in any country. I see potential and hope all the time. Among those who take part in our workshops at Kōtare, there are plenty of people across generations, including many in their 20s–30s who know the urgency of the climate and economic crises, and that these will affect them far more than us older folks. The willingness to work across generations is important, as it means sharing historical memories and knowledge, and learning from each other, and building together in a way that will always remain as each generation passes on. It also means providing opportunities for roles that a party might fill. However, there still aren't baby steps being made towards the next stage in this country. I've had to accept that I might be gone before anything, even baby steps, emerges. I hope it happens before I'm gone, but who knows? I hold onto that hope because if we don't build counter-power, we are just going to be smashed by capitalism. Whatever comes next, it's not going to be good so long as there isn't the will to organize inside and outside Parliament, as well as beyond all the forms of our country's institutions. |P

[1] Also known as *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*.

[2] The CPNZ aligned with China after the Sino-Soviet Split in the 1960s, which was unusual for a communist party during that international controversy. It led to the founding of New Zealand's Russian-friendly splinter group, the Socialist Unity Party (SUP) in 1966. Bradford's contact with the CPNZ took place after the CPNZ-SUP split.

[3] The PYM, while not formally a junior wing of the post-1966 CPNZ, had key Communist Party members driving its formation and activism. It attracted a wide group of members beyond the CPNZ, particularly student activists and others involved in anti-war campaigning.

[4] The WCL was a Maoist "liberationist" group formed in 1979 out of Wellington's Marxist-Leninist Organisation and the Hamilton-based Northern Communist Organization. It provided a home for communists who left the CPNZ when the latter group broke from China and formed a new alliance with the Party of Albania. The WCL dissolved into the short-lived Left Currents in 1990.

[5] The main street in Auckland's central business district.

[6] Tim Shadbolt is a former New Left student activist known for his approach to agitation, resulting in his founding of Huia Commune, his membership in the Hell's Angels, and his 33 arrests at various protests. In later life, he became mayor of Waitemata City and eventually Invercargill.

[7] Māori sovereignty and land rights.

[8] The AUWRC was an effort by various members on the activist Left to bring support to those directly affected by rising unemployment during the organization's existence between 1983 and 1999.

[9] The 1981 Springbok Tour protests are canonized in New Zealand popular memory as a definitive moment for the New Zealand Left, and were sparked after the conservative Prime Minister Robert Muldoon vowed to allow apartheid South Africa's all-white rugby team, the Springboks, to tour New Zealand, despite concentrated opposition from anti-racism groups. In an effort to disrupt the tour and raise consciousness surrounding racism in New Zealand's national sport, more than 150,000 people took part in over 200 demonstrations in 28 centers. 1,500 protesters were charged with offenses.

[10] Robert Muldoon's National Party government gave way to a Labour government led by David Lange in 1984 after the former declared a snap election and lost.

[11] Pasifika New Zealanders are a pan-ethnic group of New Zealanders who migrate and descend from the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands.

[12] A term named after then-Minister of Finance Roger Douglas, who spearheaded the economic policy of New Zealand's Fourth Labour Government, which included deregulation, privatization, tight monetary policy to control inflation, a floating exchange-rate, and reductions in the fiscal deficit.

[13] See, for example, Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, "#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics" (2013), available online at <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/>.

[14] Māori name for New Zealand, translated to "land of the long white cloud."

[15] The Employment Contracts Act, passed by the National government in 1991, deregulated the labor market and did away with the system of "national awards" that had previously meant each industry had its respective guaranteed minimum pay and conditions, and that unionism was compulsory. The changes meant that each employee agreed to either an individual contract or a single-employer collective agreement.

[16] The Community Wage, known as a "work-for-the-dole" scheme, was a program introduced in 1998 by Jenny Shipley's National government as a way of incentivising beneficiaries to seek work arrangements by assigning them temporary community employment in return for an additional $21 per week. The program was scrapped in 2001 under Helen Clark's Labour government.

[17] Large anti-globalization rallies took place in central Auckland against meetings of the Asian Development Bank and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) in 1995 and 1999, respectively.

[Endnotes 18–26 available online]

thought of as leaders. And although there were some women leaders, for young girls it was pretty full-on in terms of what the men expected.

MM: How do you reflect on your experience of the New Left period in general? What mistakes were made? What is worth learning from?

SB: The amazing thing about that time, and which I don't think I've ever really experienced in the same way since, was the sense of international solidarity in the late 60s — with protests around the world, like France in 1968, with what was happening in Vietnam, and with the Cultural Revolution in China. There was a sense of being part of something transcendent all across the world, and that young people could be part of making change in a real way that really stuck it to the man. From when I was 14 or 15, I was conscious that we were riding the crest of a wave that was breaking everything, or trying to. Since then, there have been lots of similar attempts, and not to say that people don't understand international solidarity today, but it was *so* strong during that time.

The other reflection I would make regarding that time is about the importance of space and place. In later life, I discovered radical geography theory, which made me think about how important having your own space is. About having more bases on the Left, more strength we can build. That's something we lack — our own liberated, autonomous spaces to operate from, as well as our own precursor or prefigurative organizations. Resistance Bookshop was very much that. It allowed for meetings where we were doing collective analyses, thinking about tactics and strategies, and having debates in ways that weren't possible in PYM or elsewhere — different levels of debate than you would get with a university lecturer.

MM: Can you say more about these debates?

SB: Resistance was made up of a whole range of people, so there was no one single ideology. There were a lot of different people and groups, both in terms of who attended the actions themselves and the meetings. We'd be arguing and discussing, and then more still in the pub. Even though I left Resistance after a year or so, I remained connected to that big group of people for a long time, even though there wasn't a formal group.

MM: During the mid-to-late 70s you were less politically active. Had you become internally disenchanted with the Left, or did other things get in the way?

SB: I followed a trap that many people on the radical Left took around that through that time, which is that I became quite heavily drug addicted. I was a junkie for a while, and I did come out of it after some years, but when I came out of it, I became the single mother of twin babies. For a few years I was totally focused on personal survival. That was the only time in my life when I've been really detached from politics. I was still watching and remaining interested, but I didn't become active again until 1980.

MM: Was this a common story in your generation? To go from one full-on, life-consuming activity — activism — to another, i.e., drugs?

SB: In our activism, we were acting militantly. We were dedicated to changing the world. We were forming close relationships with a lot of different people, having this vibrant life where we were starting to smash boundaries around sex and gender, around who you slept with, and how relationships and families were formed. A lot of the people who went to the rural communes got heavily into drugs. But so did a lot of us who stayed in the cities, because that was the whole lifestyle we were about. We were breaking mental, physical, and other boundaries in order to change the world.

But there is something in what you're saying. There are some people who live that "go for it" kind of life, and in this political world, it really is "do or die." You're just putting your whole being into this strong belief that the world can be a better place. It requires absolute dedication. I've often thought, even when I was really young, that it's quite vocational. Just like it is for priests and nuns, there are sisters and brothers on the Left.

MM: How do you feel about drugs and the Left now?

SB: I'm not anti-drugs. I learned as much from drugs, especially hallucinogens, as from anything else. And I stand by that. I hate people that just go anti-drug, because it just reminds me of that old puritanical Communist Party thing. For me, drugs were about joy and liberation, and were a wonderful journey, in a lot of ways. It's just that that journey can go quite dark if you're not careful.

MM: When you got back into activism in the 1980s, you became involved in the unemployed workers' rights movement, and you were a founding member of the Auckland Unemployed Workers' Rights Centre (AUWRC) in 1983.[8] What was it about unemployment that felt so important and necessary to you, as an issue?

SB: A few things. It was personal, in the sense that my broken career trajectory from addiction and having babies had meant that I couldn't get back to work, even though I hated being unemployed and on the dole. I had some really bad experiences as a sole mother on a Domestic Purposes Benefit. But the other side of it was that in 1981, after returning from six months in China on a student scholarship, the mobilization against the Springbok Tour was just starting.[9] I was a founding member of HART (Halt All Racist Tours) back in the late 60s and had been part of some anti-Tour actions, so my husband Bill and I knew from day one that we had to give it our all. 1981 was taken up with many arrests and getting beaten up by cops, etc. Those protests were a watershed for the Left in this country, in terms of learning what our capacity was if we put our minds to it. And our country came close to civil war, with people almost being killed. It didn't quite get there, thank goodness, but it was full-on, and a lot of us who came out of that year still had court cases going into 1982.

I had joined the Workers' Communist League in 1981, and at the end of 82, a small group of us from the WCL got together and had a meeting. We tried to think where to best direct our energy for the years ahead. So, a group of us from the WCL established a project to set up the AUWRC, and my whole involvement with the unemployed movement started there. But of course, the people we worked with in the AUWRC, as well as those we worked with in other groups, all came from different sectarian backgrounds, or, in some cases, from no political background at all.

MM: Why did your group consider unemployment a front-line issue?

SB: It was front-line for a lot of us on the Left, not just our group. Unemployment was rising fast. We had a Right-wing government, and we went on to have an even worse Right-wing government,[10] so unemployment was high in the early 1980s compared to what it had been previously. We were a country that wasn't used to high unemployment; it was a big public issue. At that time it was quite shocking, whereas now, it's just accepted that you have hundreds of thousands of people out of work. Also, because unemployed workers and welfare claimants were and are the most vulnerable workers, most organized unions didn't offer support to unemployed or redundant workers. There was also, at that time — and partly because of the anti-Springbok Tour movement — a real resurgence and uplift of thinking around Māori and indigenous peoples' struggles. For us, there was a link between the fact that unemployment and poverty affected Māori and Pasifika[11] people more than it affected others. We wanted to be right on the front line with those facing the hardest situations. We thought it was important that the people who did that political work actually had some experience of unemployment and life on a benefit themselves, rather than just coming at it from an academic or theoretical background. It's a very tough area, and you're working hard in every way. Without that kind of stamina and determination, it's hard to keep going and keep holding these groups together.

MM: Overseas readers might not be familiar with another aspect of the 1980s, which was that the then-Labour government implemented one of the world's earliest concentrated national neoliberal projects in a Western economy.

SB: That was massive. The AUWRC had been going for a while, and then the bloody Labour government betrayed the workers and the unemployed of this country. Hundreds of thousands more people went into unemployment, and new families into poverty. And there's people even now that still haven't recovered from what happened through the Rogernomics Right-wing revolution.[12] That was then cemented by the National Party in the decade after. We were fighting with and for unemployed workers and beneficiaries from that time of peak struggle right through to when our group closed down in 1999.

MM: If you had to pick one category that describes your work in unemployed workers' organization and advocacy, would you call it an issue of social justice or an issue of workers' rights?

SB: Both. I've been involved in activist work around the question and definition of "work," and around solutions to unemployment, over many years since 1983. It's a core focus for me, even now. For example, I have been involved in work around solutions like basic income, i.e., the "Fully Automated Luxury Communism" territory associated with Nick Srnicek, Alex Williams, etc.[13] Back in the 80s — and even now — I believed that for those who wanted to participate in the paid workforce, there should be a right to work, with the ability to join a trade union and be paid at least the minimum wage. The AUWRC was trying to act as a union for unemployed workers. Although, because there was a lot of sectarianism in the 80s, there were huge fights within and between unions, and between the unemployed groups.

MM: There's a quote attributed to the British economist Joan Robinson which goes, "the one thing worse for workers than being exploited in capitalism is not being exploited in capitalism," i.e., being unemployed. Fredric Jameson, meanwhile, said that if Marxism's critique of capitalism had to be reduced to one word, it would be the word "unemployment." If unemployment is the worst kind of misery under capitalism, as Robinson suggests, and yet at the same time is central to the Marxist critique of capitalism, as Jameson poses, where does that place you as an anti-capitalist? Where do you position yourself in this tension between limiting immediate misery and ending capitalism?

SB: That's the story of my life. It's a balance that requires you to make an analysis every step of the way. I've never lived in a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation, but I've been conscious of revolution and thinking about the potential of it since I was 14. When you're not living in a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation, finding a balance between reform and looking further ahead is a constant activity. The AUWRC offers one of the best examples of this principle. I was in that group for 16 years with people who did a lot of acting and thinking. Our work around unemployment and welfare included alternatives and solutions for the people we worked with, as well as offering ways of helping them to understand what their situation was about in the broader sense: what capitalism did, and why it meant they were unemployed, and why they were treated so badly, etc. We were conscious of the need to campaign for immediate reform, but also the need for long-term solutions. The first years were rough, but as they went by, we acquired a stable core that lasted for years. We got more and more politically and economically sophisticated. Although we weren't a think tank or a political party, we were still able to think and put out a lot of material. We even ended up with our own printing press, just like Resistance Bookshop back in 69.

MM: When you talk about this connection between reform and revolution, it sounds like you're addressing a dialectical relationship. But would you put it in Marxist terms? Is the dialectic and contradiction at the forefront of your thinking?

SB: In their most basic form, always. The biggest things I learned from my early learning of Marxism were historical and dialectical materialism. Don't ask me to try to explain them nowadays, though. Dialectical materialism in particular is still one of the most incredibly useful tools. Whether you're doing an academic study, out on the street, trying to build an organization, doing a big action, or forming and sustaining a big coalition, it's useful to have time to reflect and analyze what you've done so you can consciously try and learn from your experience and take those learnings forward. The idea is to put the dialectic into action. This comes by way of trying to think strategically and identify contradictions. These tools of collective analysis are some of what we do at Kōtare Research and Education for Social Change, which gives activists — such as Treaty Justice groups — the opportunity to come together and think. I've been involved with Kōtare since its beginning, in 1994, and the AUWRC helped set it up.

MM: You're interested in Paulo Freire and his pedagogical practices. Do you use those at Kōtare?

SB: Freire's ideas influenced us in the unemployed movement, before we set up Kōtare. Freire's pedagogy and the form of structural analysis was brought to Aotearoa[14] by Catholic priests in the early 1980s, having come out of liberation theology.

MM: What capacity did the New Zealand Left have in the 80s for resisting the seismic innovations of capital, such as that era's neoliberal reforms? Was the Left successful? Or did capitalism win?

SB: Capitalism won. Without a problem. The Left was fractured in the 80s, and then the unions had a near-fatal death blow with the Employment Contracts Act at the beginning of the 90s.[15] The unions that had been the main bulwark against — or in contest with — capital were tremendously weakened, partly because the unions refused to fight strongly enough, which was part of a bitter sectarian Left fight: half the unions wanted a general strike, and the other half just went along with it. Groups like ours, and other trade unions, were fighting, but we never had the strength or money. It was only the organized unions that might have been able to slow things down, but their leadership sold out.

We fought as hard as we could in the 80s. The unemployed groups were active at our peak. We had about 31 groups around the country, with a national organization. Sometimes it felt like we were the only people flying the flag, especially on the militant Left. We tried to make our actions relevant. Even if we didn't have the numbers, it was about being clear about the purpose of each action. It wasn't about winning. We never won. Being unemployed and a beneficiary, you don't, on the whole, win. One of the only "wins" we had — one that's still talked about today, among the younger generations — is that we probably stopped mass "work-for-the-dole" from happening.[16] Both Labour and National governments started to bring in such schemes, and we resisted. Apart from that, we faced a steady barrage, and things just kept getting worse. But we knew that we were on the front-line in the fight against capitalism and colonialism, so we tried to coalesce with indigenous, women's, union, and church movements. We were conscious of building coalitions. In some of the biggest actions of the 90s — like against the Asian Development Bank and APEC — we were at the heart of the organizing base.[17]

MM: That brings us to how the Left can leverage power in the unemployed workers' movement, given that unemployed workers can't withhold their labor in the same way that the employed can. Can this consolidation of heterogeneous forces on the Left, along with the sort of educational efforts you mentioned, go the whole way?

SB: No. In the 90s, we were trying to form coalitions because we didn't have a party.

MM: When you say a party, what do you mean?

SB: I mean a communist, socialist, anarchist, or syndicalist party.

MM: An extra-parliamentary party?

SB: Yeah, on the Left — which I say, because these parties can also be on the Right. The Building Our Own Future project (BOOF) in 93–94 was one of the biggest Left extra-parliamentary groups we were part of.[18] BOOF was trying to build radical Left power across different constituencies and sectors. Part of that aim was forming a People's Charter, which both gave us a commitment to and a concrete vision for a different kind of Aotearoa. We learned a lot through that year-long project, and we can still learn from it today. The big difference between now and that time is that in 93–94 there were a massive range of groups doing stuff, with different ways and some political edge. That isn't the case now; there are far fewer groups. People sometimes say we should be building an extra-parliamentary movement, or movements, but it's hard to do that when you don't have enough bases. For example, in 2010 some of us formed Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAAP),[19] which was, in some ways, the descendant of the AUWRC. During the years I was active with AAAP, we did anything to foment and nourish any political unemployed and beneficiary group, anywhere in Aotearoa, but no such group ever eventuated.

MM: If "practice" here means the formation of active political groups, and "theory" means education, was there an asymmetry between theory and practice?

SB: Yes, that's why I returned to university and did my PhD in 2014, which was about the lack of a coherent Left think tank in this country — a question we had thought about particularly in the 90s. "Think tank" can be an unfortunate term for some Leftists, but I mean it in the sense of how Die Linke in Germany has the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung.[20] We saw it as fortunate for the German Left to have a place where policy work, thinking, and education could happen. Of course, they in Germany have a different system that pays for it through their political processes. We have nothing like that here. But during the 90s, we had often talked about the idea of providing a place where the Left can think together beyond any party formations or sectors. We wanted something that would be intrinsically linked to trade unions and community-based groups, so that it would not be divorced from praxis.

MM: I found it interesting that one of the people you interviewed in your PhD thesis responded to the Left's "lack of trust" in any "specialized or smaller group" seeking to represent it by pointing out that this had once been the historical role of the party: "acting as a memory for the class, looking at the lessons of class struggles . . . and playing a consciousness raising role." What do you make of the Left's lack of trust in specialized or smaller groups whose job is to act as a memory for the class?

SB: The person quoted is absolutely right about that role of the party. That's why it's wonderful to hear about Platypus, because I had no idea about anyone trying to hold onto history in any way. It's so important that we don't lose our histories, whether that be written, oral, or any other form of history that helps us to learn from the past. That is, and was, a role that extra-parliamentary parties can play.

There has always been a lack of trust that has come with divisions on the Left, and every sectarian fight leaves its own wave of burnt people in its wake. The biggest fight I was ever part of was that of the WCL vs. the SUP in the unemployed and union movement. Unionism has issues around trust. Working in a union is hard, both because of internal politics and also being on the front line, fighting the employers. Nonetheless, a few of the people on the SUP side later became some of my closest friends, almost comrades, you could say. People have their different traditions on the Left and yet they come together anyway. When this happens, the differences disappear because they realize that if you open your eyes and decide to cross sectarian barriers, what you hold in common is far greater than what might have ideologically divided you at some earlier point in history. We in the WCL were aware of that. Ever since the WCL folded in 1990, I've been dedicated to strengthening the power of the radical Left in this country, in a non-sectarian way.

MM: Speaking of unions, you mentioned earlier that "the story of your life" was the tension between reform and revolution. One manifestation of such a tension would be the need for trade unions and the need for revolution. Would you agree with that?

SB: It's one way of looking at it. In the unemployed movement, we were aware that if we succeeded in doing away with unemployment, we were doing away with ourselves. But we thought that was a good outcome. So, there wasn't a vested self-interest in trying to keep the unemployed group going. I don't see why a union wouldn't necessarily have that attitude, either. There are different philosophies of unionism, and one of the problems with unions at the moment, is that they're deep in transactional unionism rather than thinking about the longer term, and asking themselves, "how does that help us in the longer term to build a counter-power to capitalism?" That sort of question needs to be a part of unionism, and until we are living in a society beyond capitalism, unions are one of the most, probably the most, important kind of organization.

MM: In your thesis, you identify yourself as belonging to the "transformational" Left, rather than to the reformist Left.

SB: That was a code word for "revolutionary," for those of us who openly oppose capitalism and colonization. There are all these big arguments on the Left between those who seek to build prefigurative politics and organizations inside the shell of a rotten system, and I'm in that track as well. It doesn't mean clinging to old organizational forms for the sake of it, but rather that, in rehearsing the future, you learn, and you try and live differently, so that you eventually make that future. There's no use waiting for a utopia that will never come.

MM: In a sense, your job as an activist has been to put yourself out of a job.

SB: Absolutely. We've often talked in workshops at Kōtare about the poverty industry, and how easy it is for advocacy groups like AAAP and others to fall into the dangerous trap of thinking, "we're wonderful because we're doing this work for people, and it gives us a place in society." Structurally, it would be far better if we lived in a society where groups like AAAP weren't needed. It's a matter of keeping a clear vision and having a sense of coherence between a vision for a better society and what you actually do in the day-to-day. It's the same for unions.

MM: When you say that from day one you had these self-conceptions, it sounds like your Leftist principles stem from the idea of freedom as self-transformation.

SB: No, because that's too close to the "self-transformations" of Green politics and the Green Left, for whom true liberation comes from self-transformation, such as achieving higher consciousness through Zen Buddhism, etc. It also depends on what you mean by "freedom."

MM: Just to clarify, I don't mean it in the neoliberal individualist sense.

SB: Yes, us elders keep seeing all these individualized younger people who have been brought up under neoliberalism, with student debt, social media, and all the other things that affect younger generations. Trying to think outside of capitalism is hard to do. All of us are impacted by the fact of white privilege, where we're situated, our gender, etc. It's a matter of being conscious of all those privileges, so that we can analyze context with both the short and the long-term goals in mind. That's where reform goals and revolutionary goals become coherent and linked. It's about trying to strengthen relationships between humans, and doing that in a way that isn't negative, i.e., not totalitarian and at the barrel of a gun — even though we know power comes out of the barrel of a gun.[21]

MM: Given the specter of totalitarianism, one wonders what liabilities the Left might reproduce when there is no longer a mass working-class movement for socialism nor a party to preserve the historical memory of such a movement.

SB: Unless we have working-class people, who are the most exploited in capitalism, participating in a party, the Left will not do well — for material reasons.

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